

Complete Change

As the Wilmington community settled in to cope with the changes wrought by November 10, one editor became philosophical: "The eyes of the world are upon us and we must keep up the record we are making as the only city on record that has overthrown corruption and established good government in the short space of eight hours."¹⁰⁰ Other publications in the state acknowledged that the events in Wilmington marked the beginning of a larger phenomenon: "Negro rule is at an end in North Carolina forever. The events of the past week in Wilmington and elsewhere place that fact beyond all question."¹⁰¹ With those two sentences, the editors of the *Raleigh Farmer and Mechanic* wrote a prophetic statement—whites and blacks across the state, and arguably across the nation, watched the white supremacy campaign grow unchecked, men robbed of their civil liberties at the polls, violence and murders in broad daylight, and municipal government overthrown by force, all without consequence for the perpetrators or solace for the victims. "Negro rule," the term for black Republican voting strength in Wilmington, was ended by the Democratic Party through violence, intimidation, and murder. Statewide, Democrats took ownership of the violence and used it repeatedly to stifle political ambitions of blacks—re-telling the tale became a feature of future campaigns.¹⁰²

An indicator of the heightened sense of violence in the city can be found in the 1903 city directory. That year was one of the first in which the directory contained a

section to identify locations of fire alarm call boxes plus instructions for how many taps were needed to identify an emergency. For example, 5 taps in the box called an extra hose wagon to the fire and 6 brought an extra engine. The "riot call" consisted of 10 taps and general alarm was 12 taps. Of 34 call boxes in the city, 15 were in the north side of town with only 7 on the south side and the rest in the downtown business district or the outlying industrial areas. The locations and instructions imply that Wilmington's officials anticipated trouble more often in the traditionally black section of town and stationed enough boxes in that area to ensure that if violence or danger erupted, a call box was nearby.¹⁰³

The prospects of equal civil rights for African Americans were darkened as a result of the events of 1898. As the newly elected Democratically controlled General Assembly enacted the state's first Jim Crow legislation in 1899, North Carolina joined the rest of the South in undermining the efforts of Republicans, both before and after Reconstruction, to equalize the races in education, employment, and political involvement. Future generations of Democratic Party politicians built upon the foundations of discrimination and economic disadvantage established in 1898.

The Democratic press heralded the twentieth century and the election of Democrats throughout the state as the beginning of a great dynasty for the state and an era of growth. Indeed, the state did prosper as Democratic businessmen, satisfied that their party was now in control of government, turned their minds from political intrigue to financial matters. However, the prosperity was short lived, limited largely to upper- and middle-class whites, and did not trickle down to the African American or poor white communities.

¹⁰⁰ *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 12, 1898

¹⁰¹ *Raleigh Farmer and Mechanic*, November 15, 1898.

¹⁰² Leslie H. Hossfeld, *Narrative, Political Unconscious, and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.

¹⁰³ 1903 *Wilmington City Directory*.